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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2254
INFO ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 005042

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TUNISIAN CABINET RESHUFFLE: SOME FAMILIAR FACES,
SOME NEW FACES

¶1. AN EMBASSY CONTACT IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE
CONFIRMED ON 11/17 RUMORS AND PARTIAL RADIO REPORTS THAT
PRESIDENT BEN ALI HAS MADE THE FOLLOWING CHANGES IN HIS
GOVERNMENT:

-- PRIME MINISTER: MOHAMED GHANNOUCHI, FORMER MINISTER OF
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT (REPLACING
HAMED KARAUI, WHO IS REPORTEDLY RETIRING).

-- FOREIGN MINISTER: HABIB BEN YAHIA, FORMER MINISTER OF
DEFENSE AND PREVIOUSLY FOREIGN MINISTER (REPLACING SAID BEN
MUSTAPHA, WHOSE NEXT POST HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED).

-- DEFENSE MINISTER: MOHAMED JEGHAM, FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF
OF THE PRESIDENCY, A MINISTERIAL RANK POSITION (REPLACING BEN
YAHIA, THE NEW FOREIGN MINISTER).

-- INTERIOR MINISTER: ABDALLAH KALLEL, FORMER JUSTICE
MINISTER, WHO IS RETURNING TO A POSITION HE HELD PREVIOUSLY
(REPLACING ALI CHAOUCH, WHO IS REPORTEDLY RETIRING).

-- JUSTICE MINISTER: BECHIR TEKKARI, FORMER PRESIDING JUDGE
OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (REPLACING KALLEL, THE NEW
INTERIOR MINISTER).

-- MINISTER OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS: JELLOUL JERIBI, FORMER
PRESIDENT OF ZEITOUNA UNIVERSITY, TUNISIA'S PRESTIGIOUS
ISLAMIC SCHOOL (REPLACING ALI CHEBBI, WHOSE NEXT POST, IF
ANY, IS NOT YET KNOWN).

-- MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: SADOK CHAABANE, WHO RAN
PRESIDENT BEN ALI'S RECENT RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND IS THE
PRESIDENT OF TUNISIA'S INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
(REPLACING DALY JAZI, SEE BELOW).

-- MINISTER OF EDUCATION: IYADH OUERDINI, FORMER ADVISOR TO
THE PRESIDENT (REPLACING ABDERRAHIM ZOUARI, WHOSE NEXT POST
HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED).

-- MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND FOREIGN
INVESTMENT: FETHI MERDASSI, FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE, THE
SECOND-RANKING OFFICER, IN THAT MINISTRY (REPLACING
GHANNOUCHI, THE NEW PRIME MINISTER).

-- MINISTER IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE IN CHARGE OF
HUMAN RIGHTS, COMMUNICATIONS, AND RELATIONS WITH THE CHAMBER
OF DEPUTIES: DALY JAZI, FORMER MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION.
THIS IS A NEW POSITION.

-- SPECIAL ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT: ABDELAZIZ BEN DHIA,
THE FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRATIC
RALLY (RCD), THE RULING PARTY. (NOTE: THE PRESIDENCY HAS
SEVERAL SPECIAL ADVISORS, AND IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER BEN
DHIA IS REPLACING SOMEONE OR OCCUPYING A NEW POSITION.)

-- SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY: SLAHADINE CHERIF,
FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE GOVERNMENT (IN THE PRIME
MINISTER'S OFFICE). NOTE: THIS IS A NEW POSITION, BUT OUR
CONTACT SPECULATED THAT CHERIF WOULD SERVE A SIMILAR FUNCTION
AS MOHAMED JEGHAM, THE NEW MINISTER OF DEFENSE, HAD AS CHEF
DE CABINET IN THE PRESIDENCY. AS NO/NO REPLACEMENT HAD BEEN
NAMED FOR THE CHIEF OF STAFF SLOT.

-- SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE GOVERNMENT: ABDALLAH KAABI,

GOVERNOR (NOT MAYOR) OF TUNIS (REPLACING CHERIF, THE NEW SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY).

-- SECRETARY OF STATE IN CHARGE OF THE NEWLY CREATED NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT FUND "2121": CHEDLI LAROUSSE.

-- SECRETARY OF STATE IN CHARGE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH: ABDELKARIM ZEBIDI (REPLACING MOHAMED BEN HAMED).

-- SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS (THE MINISTRY'S SECOND-RANKING POSITION): SAMIRA BELHAJ, THE FORMER HEAD OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF TUNISIAN WOMEN (UNFT), IN A NEWLY CREATED POSITION.

-- SECRETARY OF STATE OF PUBLIC HEALTH (THE MINISTRY'S SECOND-RANKING POSITION): NAZIHA BEN CHEIKH, FORMERLY (LIKE BELHAJ) OF UNFT, IN A NEWLY CREATED POSITION.

12. THIS LIST MAY/MAY NOT BE COMPREHENSIVE (ALTHOUGH OUR CONTACT BELIEVES THAT IT IS AND IT IS IDENTICAL TO A LIST WHICH THE EGYPTIAN EMBASSY RECEIVED FROM OTHER SOURCES). MORE DETAILS WILL BE AVAILABLE IN THE COMING DAYS, AND WE WILL FOLLOW UP WITH ANALYSIS AND BIO INFORMATION.

13. NOTEWORTHY IS THE FACT THAT, AS OF NOW, MANY OF THE EMBASSY'S CLOSE INTERLOCUTORS ON ISSUES OF PRESSING CONCERN HAVE REMAINED IN PLACE: MINISTER OF COMMERCE MONDHER ZENAIDI, WHO IS HEADING TUNISIA'S DELEGATION TO THE WTO; MINISTER OF INDUSTRY MONCEF BEN ABDALLAH, WHO WILL ATTEND THE AFRICAN ENERGY MINISTERS CONFERENCE IN TUCSON; AND MINISTER OF TRANSPORT HOUCINE CHOUK, WHO WE ARE URGING TO ATTEND THE WORLD AVIATION "BEYOND OPEN SKIES" MINISTERIAL IN CHICAGO. ALSO UNCHANGED ARE, INTER ALIA, MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AHMED FRIAA, MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT FAIZI KEFI, MINISTER OF FINANCE TAOUFIK BACCAR, MINISTER OF CULTURE ABDELBAKI HERMASSI, MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE SADOK RABEH, MINISTER OF TOURISM SLAHEDDINE MAAOUI, AND OTHERS. IN ADDITION, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT KEY INTERLOCUTORS HAVE SIMPLY CHANGED PORTFOLIOS, SUCH AS FOREIGN MINISTER HABIB BEN YAHIA AND DEFENSE MINISTER JEGHAM. THE EMBASSY HAS A LONG HISTORY OF WORKING WITH THE NEW PRIME MINISTER IN HIS PREVIOUS POSITION.

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